TST Homiletics Seminar 1:2 (Summer, 2007)

"'Street Preaching' in Strike Mode-- Winnipeg, 1919"

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Without questioning the need to proclaim justice from our pulpits, I am convinced that the relative safety of our traditional worship spaces militates against the often shocking discomfort of hearing Amos' thundering call to "let justice roll down..." It was not always so, nor need it always be so. Many times in the history of Jesus' followers proclaiming in the streets or marketplaces proved characteristic of many notable preachers. Think of the loci of Jesus' parables in Galilean villages or Paul's appeals in synagogue squares or at Athens' *Agora*. Franciscans had a vibrant reputation for preaching in the urban ghettos of medieval towns, and no less a stuffy figure than John Wesley took his message into the fields and streets of Hanoverian England. More recently we honour the rallying sermons of Martin Luther King Jr. at numerous protests and rallies.

Canada has not remained immune to this kind of proclamation. One notable example emerged from the Protestant Prairie Social Gospel, where the Rev. William Ivens, founder of Winnipeg's labour churches, played a leading pastoral role in the city's famous strike in May and June of 1919. Part of that ministry included preaching to large crowds in the city's major parks. What led Ivens to leave a seemingly traditional ministry to become the founder of pro-labour churches, the editor of the strike newspaper, *The Western Labor News* and the de facto chaplain of the strike itself? Such actions culminated in his arrest and the publication of some prison sermons as well.

The broader context of Ivens' radical preaching emerged from a two-pronged reality. First, on a more narrow scale William Ivens was part of a broad movement of social reform within Protestantism known as the social gospel. Grounded in a liberal optimistic theology, which its adherents felt was embodied in the Kingdom message of Jesus, the social gospel claimed that the essence of the Christian message called for a societal transformation of justice and co-operation. Indeed, the most radical of its advocates, including Ivens and A. E. Smith, had trained under their mentor Salem Bland, the church historian at Wesley College in Winnipeg and then served in Manitoba congregations. Second, within a wider context this social gospel emerged from the grim reality of deep class division within the booming Prairie economy. In both Manitoba and Saskatchewan, wheat was gold, and the relatively new transcontinental railway system controlled the flow of grain to Canadian and world markets. The railroad monopoly, the Grain Exchange and eastern financiers isolated the independent grain farmers and forced them to accept unjust prices for their wheat. Out of this oppression the farmers began to organize resistance, and they did so on the basis of social gospel values. A similar class divide characterized the booming city of Winnipeg, Canada's "Gateway to the West." On one side aligned the city fathers, optimistic entrepreneurs in journalism, politics, finance, warehousing and rails. They united behind an urban program of "Boosterism," fuelled by the optimism of expansion and economic profits. Combining a rugged individualism with their wealth and power

they expressed their Protestant faith via a tough manliness and a patronizing of church institutions. These values blinded them to the bleak reality of Winnipeg's darker side as exemplified by the immigrant ghettos of North Winnipeg that supplied the cheap industrial labour for the city's social and economic elite. [1]

To some extent social gospel leaders made efforts to address such appalling conditions. Beyond the seeking of urban reforms through direct municipal government intervention, direct efforts sought to provide immediate relief for the residents of these crowded and disease-ridden North Winnipeg. Notable among these reformers was the family of James Shaver Woodsworth who ran the settlement house known as the All People's Mission. In addition, a number of major congregations found themselves in the midst of changing neighbourhoods where reasonably prosperous middle-class people began to move out as working class families moved in. Such was the case in the McDougall Church Methodist ministry of William Ivens. Although membership continued to decline slowly in the first two years of his pastorate, the popular pastor could take comfort that financial giving increased more than three-fold. During that same period Ivens intensified his open support of labour causes and became one of the city's most noted social gospel activists. However, serious trouble began with his pacifism during the Great War (1914- 1918), a position that antagonized the intense British patriotism of many in his flock. His open critique of the war effort as a capitalist conflict prompted the parish board to pass a resolution urging its members "to make all necessary sacrifices for the cause of peace" hoping thereby to heal the split between pro-war and anti-war-supporters. At the same time a motion was passed calling for Ivens' resignation by a vote of twelve to seven. Initially he refused to resign. Instead he cried out from his pulpit: "I am a man first, a pastor second. In this pulpit I will speak only as I understand God. You can have me as your minister or not, but outside the Church I am a man and will not be interfered with in my speech on public questions." [2] The gauntlet had been cast, and the response proved swift. The church board met again and passed a motion requesting that the Methodist Conference remove Ivens from McDougall Church. In the interim between this resolution and the Conference meeting Rev. Ivens toured a number of western cities as an advocate for the cause of labour. In the meantime a campaign erupted within his congregation and the city at large protesting the church board's effort to remove him. Nonetheless, the Conference decided to remove him from McDougall while offering him another Winnipeg pastorate. Ivens refused fearing similar rebuffs against his antiwar principles. Instead he asked the Conference to grant him a year's leave in order to form a congregation directly

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[1] For details of this background, consult Richard Allen's *The Social Passion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); and Chapters 12 and 13 in Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Two excellent books provide pictures of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Winnipeg: 1). Alan F. J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1974- 1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975) and Artibise, ed., *Gateway City: Documents on the City of Winnipeg, 1873- 1914* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1979).

[2] Quotes in Harry and Mildred Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent*, Ch. 2 "For Universal Brotherhood in God's Name: William Ivens" (Edmonton: NeWest Publishers, 1997), p. 53. The entire chapter gives a solid portrayal of the Ivens' ministry from parish to politics. Vera Fast offers another thorough picture of the labour church experience in *Prairie Spirit*, eds., Dennis L. Butcher et al., "The Labor Church in Winnipeg," pp. 233- 249 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985).

linked to the labouring classes. A relieved Methodist establishment granted him a year's reprieve from traditional pastoral duties. Without being fully aware of this momentous decision, William Ivens had crossed his Rubicon. [3]

On July 8, 1918 the labour church held its inaugural meeting in the city's labour temple. Within less than a year Ivens and his pro-working class congregation had plunged into full solidarity with the Winnipeg General Strike, Canada's major industrial work stoppage. From mid-May to mid-June, 1919, the city's toilers had ground the city to a halt, taking over the entire municipal operations in an effective, non-violent fashion. Rev. Ivens and his labour church proved essential as part of the strike's leadership. In fact, Ivens edited the strike newspaper *The Western Labor News* and increased this weekly's circulation before and during the strike period. However, equally if not more important was his preaching role. Whether from the pulpit of the labour congregation or at labour rallies or in the local parks to thousands, Ivens won recognition as one of labour's most convincing orators. The strike itself did not provide William Ivens with his "street speaking" baptism of fire." His earlier activism had provided numerous opportunities to hold fourth at rallies and labour meetings. So, by the time the city fell under the strike's management Ivens was already a finely honed crowd orator. At the height of the strike Ivens addressed a mass rally in Winnipeg's Victoria Park in excess of 7,000 people. Building on the liberal optimism of social gospel theology, Ivens had this to say:

> Happy is the strike that the sun shines on. We have not yet passed this way before. It is the path of the pioneer that we tread today in the general strike. The new venture has its thrills, its fears, its enthusiasm.... The new harbor of safety can be reached only by a bold sailing into the unknown. [4]

On another occasion he rallied the strikers with the socialistic dream of the radical wing of the social gospel:

> In a short time there would be no need to use the weapon of the strike. We shall not need to strike when we own industry,-- and we wont (sic.) relinquish the fight until we control it. This is not revolution. The workers are docile.... But the workers realize their importance and they see no reason why they should not own and enjoy, since they produce all. Today, now that their labor power has been withdrawn, there was no production. [5]

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[3] For details involving Ivens struggle with his congregation and the wider Methodist institution, before, during and after the Winnipeg General Strike, see Oscar L. Cole-Arnal, "The Prairie labour churches: The Methodist input," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 34/1 (2005), pp. 3- 26.

[4] "Special Strike Edition #2," *Western Labor News*, May 19, 1919.

[5] "Special Strike Edition #3, *Western Labor News*, May 20, 1919.

This popular touch found expression not only in speeches to a broad public but also in poetry, hymns and journalistic writing. In the strike newspaper Ivens described in optimistic tone one such religious-political strike rallies at Victoria Park:

> The scene itself was an inspiration. Victoria Park is fringed with trees which constitute the walls of the Labor Church; the greensward is the floor and there are no rented pews; the pulpit is a rough platform in the centre of the park; and the sky, illuminated by the stars, constitutes the roof and dome. Never has a church service in Winnipeg had such a gathering. It will never be forgotten while this generation lives. [6]

As well, the labour pastor penned a number of hymns reflecting his social gospel values and activism which were sung by the throngs who gathered at his church meetings or in the local park protests. The following two stanzas from a favourite portray the flavour of these rousing appeals:

> We knelt before kings, we bent before lords;
> For theirs were the crowns, and theirs were the swords;
> But the times of the bending and bowing are past,
> And the day of the people is dawning at last!
>
> Great day of Jehovah, prophets and seers,
> Have sung of thy coming thousands of years.
> Thank God for each sign that the dark night is past;
> And the day of the people is dawning at last. [7]

Sadly Ivens' optimism proved premature. The dark night had not passed. The embattled pastor received two setbacks, one on top of the other. First of all, his strike notoriety so shocked the Methodist Conference that they refused to extend his leave of absence and insisted he take another posting immediately. Thus he faced either an end to his labour ministry or the revoking of his ordination. In spite of massive protests his ecclesiastical establishment held firm, forcing Ivens to follow his conscience into ministerial exile. Shortly thereafter during the early morning hours of June 17 police broke into his home, hustling him off to jail and then on to Stony Mountain Penitentiary. Although bail was raised and Ivens was released in a few days, the strike was broken. For the next year Ivens organized satellite labour churches, spoke at rallies to raise money for his and other jailed strike leaders' upcoming trial and continued to militate actively in labour politics.

The trial itself became yet another pulpit for the embattled labour preacher. Throngs of

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[6] Quoted on p. 69 in Gutkin & Gutkin, ***Profiles***.

[7] Quoted on p. 239 in Butcher, *Prairie.*

supporters gathered regularly to cheer him on while he advocated in his own defence. "Why am I supporting labor today?" he cried out. "I do these things from a sense of duty, from a sense of right." Indeed, he expanded on this point at the completion of his appeal: "Once I make up my mind that a thing is right, I will stick by it and will take condemnation from you or anybody else. If you say I am guilty I am prepared to go to the penitentiary.... My fate is in your hands, [but] my destiny is in the hands of the Almighty and myself." [8] Ivens and his comrades were found guilty of seditious conspiracy and sentenced to one year in prison. During that time a tragedy struck the family— his infant son died suddenly from diphtheria, and he was released temporarily to attend the funeral. He returned to prison, finished his term after which he took a seat in the Manitoba legislature as a member of that province's independent labour party. Although he later joined the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and served in the party actively until his death in 1958, he never won elective office again. Instead he went to chiropractic school, earned his degree and practised this alternative therapy for the remainder of his life in Kenora, Ontario.

To be sure, William Ivens was not Christianity's, let alone Canada's, sole street speaker. The tradition remains a long and noble one. Yet in Ivens we find a particular mode fit for the social context and that particular moment in Canadian history. Imbued with the social gospel's optimism which insisted that Canada's place in the sun depended on its commitment to social reform and justice, Ivens linked his vision with the labour movement which he saw as the Kingdom of God's engine of progress and the only force capable of rolling back the spectre of corporate injustice. He adopted labour's methods of mass action, organizing and rallies and imbued them with his Protestant Christian ideals. In retrospect Ivens' hopes proved illusory, yet it could be argued that his more radical embodiment of the social gospel on the streets of a major city on strike contained more realism than his more timid comrades who felt that the promulgation of progressive statements by church bodies would convert the wealthy and powerful to programs of gentle justice. [9]

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[8] Quoted on p. 81 of Gutkin & Gutkin, ***Profiles***.

[9] In my book *To Set the Captives Free: Liberation Theology in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1998) I place the Prairie Social Gospel in the context of community liberationist forces within Canadian life and history. I leave it to justice preachers to assess its value in blending tradition and current activism.

"Feminist Method as a Critical Tool for Preaching in the 21ST Century"

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Two things in my immediate teaching led me to this topic:

1. An article by Williamson that studied the relationship between biblically based preaching and anti-Judaism. His survey on preaching concluded that anti-Judaism increased when preaching adhered closely to the biblical text. Anti-Judaism in preaching was less pronounced in the early years of the twentieth century when the social gospel directed the sermon. Anti-Judaism became more pronounced in sermons during the biblical theology movement and the privileging of expository preaching. Committed as I am to preaching the bible context, to me it seemed that the preacher needed some tool or method that would help to ensure that the good news does not become bad news for Jews or anyone else for that matter.

2. The second point arose out of my use of Long's *The Witness of Preaching* as one of my texts in the introductory course. From this introduction to preaching I think students generally get a solid sense of the basics. It is the exegetical method espoused in it that seems weak. At the SBL meetings in Washington, David chaired a session on preaching. I have forgotten its title. Long was one of the participants. In what he said, and its contrast with the contribution of one of the other participants, it became even clearer that his way into exegesis for preachers seems to privilege a non-engaged, western perspective. One of the presenters without apology spoke of how she taught preaching from an engaged, interested, context specific commitment to liberation – a post-modern, post colonial perspective.

As I reflected further on these two experiences, it became clearer to me that at least one set of tools exists that is not only helpful, but, I would argue, critical for preachers.

I have been working with a feminist biblical model for over twenty-five years. The most comprehensive work is that of Elisabeth Schűssler Fiorenza; it spans over thirty years of research and reflection. Let me first situate this method briefly[1], and then look in a preliminary way at what it offers to the preacher.

Feminist method situates itself broadly. It argues that biblical interpretation is a public discourse which needs to recognize that its contemporary social location includes issues arising from injustice, oppression and exploitation. Fiorenza advocates a rhetorical ethical

[1] Elisabeth Schűssler Fiorenza. *Rhetoric and Ethics: The Politics of Biblical Studies.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 48-55.

interpretation. This means decentering historical critical and pre-critical approaches to make room for interpretations from a variety of social locations.

Three aspects are central in this:

1. Self-disclosure – an identification, recognition of the limitations of one's interpretive stance because of how it is fixed in its particular social, political, racial, geographical, gendered location. An image here speaks of a searchlight that casts its beam of light in a circle. It illuminates a great deal, but not all; in that it sheds its light from a fixed position and in certain places shadows or darkness exist. Hence the first aspect is for all interpreters to identify their own assumptions, pre-understandings, biases. In my classes I use the picture gleaned from a first year psychology class of the old woman/young woman, both in the picture. Without adding or taking anything away, as my eyes refocus, I eventually see two women where at first I saw only one.

2. This method emphasizes an ethics of interpretations that is four-fold.
   - Ethics of reading (limitations of translations; rhetorical nature of biblical writings and their specific social/cultural/political location: an important question would ask "how does it effect our interpretation to know that all of the New Testament books are written by conquered people living under an exploitative empire?")
   - Ethics of scholarship: Bultmann summed this up well when he said "there is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter".
   - Ethics of interpretive practice investigates categories of analysis, the theoretical frameworks of methods used.
   - Ethics of valuation and judgment argues that biblical interpreters are not only responsible for their choice of an interpretive model, but for the ethical consequences of their interpretation. They are responsible for whether they do justice not only to the biblical text but to contemporary readers who are affected by these interpretations today.

   Elisabeth Schűssler Fiorenza asks a basic question: Does a given interpretation result in knowledge and public discourse that can intervene in practices of injustice and exploitation and motivate people to struggle against them, or is it used to marginalize certain people of groups, and to legitimate injustice and exploitation?

3. The third aspect draws attention to a focal point for feminist interpretation: patriarchy

   "Patriarchy is the name commonly given to sexist social structures. Coned from the Greek *pater/patros* (father) and *arche* (origin, ruling power, or authority), patriarchy is a form of social organization in which power is always in the hand of the dominant man or men, with others ranked below in a graded series of subordinations reaching down to the least powerful who form a large base. As classically defined by Aristotelian political philosophy, this system involves not simply the natural rule of men over women but very precisely the absolute rule of the freeborn male head of household over wives, children,

> male and female slaves, and nonhuman property as the cornerstone of the very structure of the state. The traditional pyramidal pattern of social relations in nondemocratic forms of state governance, families, the church, and the like has sedimented the dominance of ruling men to the point of making it seem indeed natural."[2]

Feminist interpretation is not just about – isn't limited to the relationship of men and women. It is a structure of society inherited in the western world from the Greek city state. Eastern interpreters might better work with the structure inherited from Confucius. Patriarchy has to do with multiple layers of hierarchy and potential oppression. Religious patriarchy, argues Elizabeth Johnson, is the hardest to deconstruct because it claims to be divinely inspired. Examples of this include our preferred images for God, models of ministry, etc.

The Method

When I mentioned Williamson's study at the beginning, I suggested that tools are needed if the biblical interpreter and, I would suggest, the preacher are to do the kind of deep reflection that is required when preaching from the biblical text. Fiorenza's method[3] identifies seven strategies for emancipatory interpretation. These strategies, she says, are not linear, but more on the order of a dance or stew. Together they add new ingredients or spices that create a new taste of flavour.

- Conscientization
- Critical analysis of domination
- Suspicion (detective)
- Reconstruction or remembering (quilt maker)
- Assessment and evaluation
- Imagination
- Transformation for action for change.

The goal of these moves or strategies is to displace literalist, doctrinal, positivist – scientific i.e. read enlightenment, depoliticized and hegemonic practices of reading. It's a complex model, but its goal is simple – the transformation of the present ethos of biblical interpretation in the interest of all non-persons struggling in neocolonial situations for human dignity, justice and well being.

Let me briefly go through the stages of her method and then move to some preliminary reflections on why this is critical for preachers.

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[2] Elizabeth Johnson, *She who is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), p. 23.

[3] Elisabeth Schűssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethics: The Politics of Biblical Studies*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 48-55.

1. **Conscientization** – hermeneutics of experience and social location – asks us to reflect on how women/men's social, cultural, religious location has shaped their experience with a reaction to a particular biblical text or story. What assumptions then are built into any and every approach to the text?

2. Then the rhetorical move changes to an **analysis of domination** with its insistence on systemic analysis (not just rearranging the deck chairs when the Titanic is actually sinking). This systemic analysis seeks to disentangle the ideological functions of religious texts for inculcating and legitimating patriarchal structures. One biblical writer speaking of anthropological systems indicates that religion in a society has a world legitimating or world shattering role vis a vis the systems within which it exists. This move asks for a disentangling from these systems that makes it clear which one of these options needs to be privileged.

3. **Suspicion** – seeks to demystify structures of domination that are found in the text. Like a detective it raises questions, analyzes clues, reads against the grain. It calls us to be suspicious of the various disguises that can be used to cover up and distort reality.

4. **Reconstruction or Remembering** – In an earlier work Elisabeth likens this to making a quilt – pattern emerges from how one sews patches together. A different ordering produces different pattern, e.g. when you ask the question "do women minister in the New Testament?", where you start and what you privilege is extremely important.

5. **Assessment – Evaluation** – Here she calls for an ethical and theological evaluation, e.g. a doctrinal paradigm of interpretation advocates a hermeneutics of consent submission to its reading.

For example, from a feminist perspective, women need to be careful of biblical values of suffering, forgiveness, purity, obedience to authority figures – these can be dangerous to one's health. Therefore, a hermeneutics of evaluation seeks to adjudicate the oppressive tendencies as well as the liberative possibilities of such doctrine.

6. **Hermeneutics of Imagination** – emphasizes dreaming a different world. We all use imagination to fill in gaps, silences in the biblical story. This work, Elisabeth argues, is essential but also needs to be constantly scrutinized by a hermeneutics of suspicion since imagination is both informed and deformed by our present realities.

7. The final piece is a **hermeneutics of transformation**. Very simply it is a commitment to explore avenues and possibilities for changing and transforming relationships of domination in texts, traditions and everyday life.

Reformed people talk about being reformed and always reforming – the latter always seems more difficult to construct and live.

This is a complex model and the argument can be made that it is too much for the preacher to deal with on a weekly basis. For me, simply having it always at the forefront of my thinking when I approach the biblical text is like a yellow caution light at an intersection.

What Does All This Say to the Preacher?

1. It puts forward the importance of a healthy hermeneutics of suspicion about the lectionary. Who made what decisions and why? What is missing? It asks questions about the why of certain starting points and endings, certain omissions in between. Most critical of all, it asks what conclusions the particular ordering already leads us to make before we begin.

   For me, of particular importance are the conclusions about Judaism that are made, supersessionist assumptions. For example, internal critiques in the Old Testament, i.e. prophetic critiques within Judaism become God's judgment on a people and a starting point for the New Testament.

2. It calls us to a healthy skepticism of all translations. In the present, most mainline schools in Canada no longer require students for ministry to learn the biblical languages. The question is how will our preachers be able to make a judgment on what translation to use. Will it be the simplest? The one most accessible on the internet? And whichever one they choose, how will they be able to assess accuracy, or the possibility of the text beyond the literal? Again this is of critical nature for our relationship with Judaism. For example in John's Gospel, the upper room "for fear of the Jews", how should it read? "For fear of the Jewish leaders who collaborated with the Romans"? In Matthew 13:54 there is described a hometown visit of Jesus in "their synagogue." Yet if it is his hometown surely it is "his synagogue".

3. A feminist method emphasizes the need to know one's pre-understanding, how one is led by one's own experiences. A feminist method always privileges the other and in its ethical stance demands that the preacher stands for the other. The preacher continually is required to assess his/her work in terms of for whom is it good news! This keeps the preacher humble while at the same time giving the preacher a sense of the critical nature of his/her work.

4. Feminist method is ecumenical, global, and inclusive. It calls us to embrace all these variables as we exegete in the preparation of our sermons, i.e. think globally and locally!

5. And finally (at least for this presentation), feminist methods implore us always to forefront a reflective understanding of our contemporary cultural moment. The recent Yale Divinity School publication entitled *The Future of the Prophetic Voice*, in memory of William Sloane Coffin, S.J., seeks to define the present cultural moment. It states:

> "Technologies of globalization have created a world with porous boundaries and infinite possibilities for those with economic wealth and political capital to promote their own ideologies for good or ill. Living communities today are geographically expansive, highly culturally fluid, and as diverse as internet access and international travel will allow." [4]

The article continues "Because communities are dynamic, hybridized webs of relationships in a process of constant redefinition, no single story of origins or identity will suffice any longer, whether for a single individual or for a community."[5]

Feminist method (as does a post-colonial method) embraces this moment as a freedom from coercive metanarratives that never really welcomed those further down the patriarchal pyramid. All this suggests that church congregations are living into an identity that is increasingly global, ethnically hybrid and decentered from European and North-American narratives.

Such complexity within our cultural life necessitates a set of tools or strategies that can at least help us organize and prioritize the questions that we bring to the biblical texts, for as we know so well, in reality the biblical text only answers the questions we pose!

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[4] Carolyn J. Sharp, "Voiced in Paradox: Prophecy and the Contemporary Church" in *The Future of the Prophetic Voice.* Winter, 2006, pp. 10-13.

[5] Ibid., p. 10.

"*Preaching as a Social Act*: The evolution of a homiletic theme"

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Production of *Preaching as a Social Act*

How and why do books get written individually and collectively? Many arise out of some felt need that gives rise to an idea and then a process toward a proposal. Along the way research is engaged, various people are consulted, encouragements lead to actual movement to write, edit and produce a manuscript. The manuscript, however, may not be an end but a gateway to further developments.

Preaching as a Social Act was sent to Abingdon Press in December of 1986 and published in 1988. Back in 1984 Ron Allen, a colleague in the Academy of Homiletics, and I hatched the idea of a collection of essays that would **systematically** address the sociological dimension of homiletics. All kinds of cultural and social influences on preaching had been recognized but no systematic analysis of this socialization had been worked out in the literature of homiletics. So we sketched an outline of 5 or 6 areas of homiletics that needed social analysis: the larger social context, the formation of preacher and congregation, the social aspects of Scripture and its interpretation and, finally, the social nature of language. We sent this sketch to 15 members of AH for feedback. The response was overwhelmingly positive with many interesting ideas. We revised our proposal and selected writers, two of whom had given us feedback.

With positive responses from eight writers we submitted a proposal to Abingdon Press in June 1985 with the support of Fred Craddock (who also suggested the title for the book). I would be editor, Ron would write a chapter and each contributor would include both an essay and a sermon (with reflection on the sermon). These were to be submitted to me no later than June, 1986 when I was about to begin a six-month sabbatical. By early September I had returned manuscripts for revision which came back very quickly. In late September I sent a rough copy of the book to sociologist and theologian, Gregory Baum, in Montreal for his assessment. He was quite supportive but thought the book needed an "Afterword," a sort of summing up of the chapters with possibilities for further reflection. I wrote that over the following few weeks and then mailed the final manuscript to Abingdon Press. Their editor made only very minor changes.

Why Did This Systematic Analysis Emerge in 1984?

First, let me note a kind of structural response. This book would not have evolved as it did without the Academy of Homiletics and particularly its evolution as a learned society in the early 1980s. The Academy had been a kind of network of individual teachers of preaching who received a paper from one of its members and followed it with an extended discussion. This evolved into a series of papers on a common theme with respondents followed by deliberation in smaller informal groups. But then more formal groups were started around areas of interest

(Theology of the Word, Narrative and Imagination, Pedagogy, Preaching and Social Concerns, and Liturgical Preaching). The inclination of the formal groups was toward possible publications and four of these eventually emerged: on narrative, pedagogy, preaching biblically and ours on preaching as a social act.

What is it that gets us to invest ourselves in a major way in some specific area of research and writing? It is a question that doctoral students often ponder. Often it arises from some experience. Sometimes behind that experience there is a longer history that may have been largely submerged or subconscious. The triggering experience for me was a sabbatical in 1981 part of which was in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. My time in Managua was especially jarring. I was living at the Baptist Seminary there amid a world of devastation. For eight years this city looked like Dresden after World War Two. Two walls of a building left standing here and three [walls] of another building over there. I felt overwhelmed. As I sat on my little cot (the only furniture in my room!), I suddenly remembered a part of my personal past that I had long forgotten. I grew up in an immigrant family. The Great Depression of the1930s in Canada drove my farming father off of his land and into the city. Then when the war came and food rationing was just part of daily life. But as we moved from lower class to lower middle class, this past gradually submerged inside of us. Suddenly, in Managua it all came back. The experience was visceral.

But the '60s and '70s also contributed to my evolution. In the mid 1960s I was doing doctoral studies in Richmond, Virginia, at the height of the Civil Rights revolution. We lived on the edge of a black community that moved across the street into our block. The reaction of our neighbours was shocking. But on our return to Canada and the eastern shore of New Brunswick I was even more surprised that much of the same patterns of racial behaviour existed between Canadian English-speaking people and French-speaking Acadians in the small fishing village where we lived and in the surrounding area.

I moved to Quebec in 1968 as the "Quiet Revolution" emerged and found the congregation I served in St. Lambert to be socially frightened of losing its privileged position. These English-speaking people were wonderfully generous and showed courage in exploring how to be God's people but they did not seem to know how they had been socialized in ways that seemed to me to be limiting their appropriation of the Gospel. I sensed this but did not quite know how to help them through my preaching.

After nine years of working with the theological colleges at McGill University – during which time I wrote a good deal on social hermeneutics. I remember how shocked I was when first reading Phyllis Trible's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Why had male interpreters failed to see in the biblical text what women scholars like Trible saw? The sociality of the interpreter became a precursor of the sociality of the preacher.

In preparation for my Central American trip in 1981, I wrote some papers on social hermeneutics and also one on preaching (submitted for the Academy of Homiletics) entitled, "Social hermeneutic toward a revolution in preaching." Upon my return, I wrote another (more

radical) paper for AH, "Preaching as revolutionary witness opting for social hermeneutics." I was trying to sort out how my biblical studies work could affect the preaching task when I concluded that the preaching task (correctly understood) already had an edge and my job as preacher was to come to the text and the congregation with this disposition.

In preparation for this colloquium I was going through some AH papers from the early '80s. Among them I found a fascinating letter from Gregory Baum who had read my second paper (we were McGill colleagues at the time). He felt that I had gone too far. He lauded my passion but challenged the notion of revolutionary preaching in a non-revolutionary context. People hearing this kind of preaching would not know what to do with it and would simply be frustrated. We cannot lift insights from Latin American liberation theology without contextualizing them for our own North American context.

So the Academy of Homiletics was a place to work out some of these issues and to do so with colleagues. The testimony of experience requires discernment. That discernment comes through the work of the Holy Spirit. Often, the Spirit uses colleagues, the church and others to help us gain necessary insight as we engage in projects like *Preaching as a Social Act*.

The Implicit Homiletic in Preaching as a Social Act

What were we trying to articulate in *Preaching as a Social Act*? Let me just state the obvious. We were exploring the notion that all preaching is contextual. Preachers and their listeners are socialized by the world in which they live. Even our primary text, Scripture, has been shaped by its various social contexts, and its interpreters are similarly influenced by their own socialization. In addition, our understanding and use of language reflects our social world.

This is to say that even though we may say that preaching is first and foremost a theological act, we also need to recognize the strong and pervasive, often subliminal influence of culture on the church. In other words, the church is always being pulled both by the Gospel and also by the surrounding culture. We cannot assume that these move in the same direction. By becoming more conscious of our socialization we can be more discerning as to how the Gospel (with the aid of the Spirit) enables us to discern God's way in our lives and in our world. Then our preaching could not only be more sharply aligned with the Gospel but it will also become more intentional in indicating how this is similar to (or more often, perhaps) different from the society in which we live. Increasingly in a secular culture, preaching needs not only to indicate the Way of Christ, but also to say how this is different from the world.

In addition, preaching out of an awareness of our socialization enables the sermon to address not only individual listeners but also their larger social world. Jesus Christ is not only a personal Saviour but also Lord of history, the one who redeems our planet including its social, political and economic arrangements. Theology provides the imperative and the grace to proclaim and witness to the full counsel of God. Such preaching is inevitably a social act.

Post Publication Reflections and Developments

Some time after the publication of *Preaching as a Social Act*, I became more aware that we had not adequately developed a thorough interplay between theology and sociology. While the theological dimension is both articulated in the Introduction and picked up again in the Afterword, the volume as a whole did not inter-relate theology and sociology as systematically as I now see necessary. Ron Allen and I had not thought this through adequately at the project design stage and so we had been less specific about this that I now think would have been helpful. Even so many of the chapters included thoughtful theological dimensions and yet I now think this volume as a whole was more sociology than theology.

I came to this critique when I started teaching Preaching as a Social Act as a second level preaching course. One of the lecture/discussion topics I added to the course was "When theology shapes proclamation for society." I also rediscovered Stringfellow's trenchant social analysis which was so thoroughly rooted in his attempts to live what he called a biblical ethic. His challenge to the church was to be steeped in the Word of God so that one's whole perspective and behaviour might be more closely shaped by the Gospel – an understanding of Gospel that contrasted sharply with what he called a culture of death. Furthermore, Stringfellow parted company with East Harlem Protestant Parish because they put social reform ahead of discerning the Word of God. Without the lens of the Word, the church became but another social institution instead of a witness to the transforming power of Christ.

It has been hard to tell just how *Preaching as a Social Act* has contributed to homiletics since 1988. Some Academy members have demonstrated a keen awareness of the importance of social context for preaching: David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice*, Nora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, and Walter Burghardt, *Preaching the Just word*. I also find in Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas a caution against the captivity of congregations by a culture that reflects little of the Gospel. They point out that the real problem in preaching is not one of better communication but of an urgent need to call for conversion. Other works focus on specific aspects of social location: women's issues (Christine Smith, Nora Tubbs Tisdale, Mary Donovan Turner), disabilities (Cathy Black) and ethnicity (Eunjoo Kim) to mention a few examples.

In the 1990s I wrote a couple of papers on theology and preaching (drawing especially on the theology of Miroslav Volf, Michael Welker and Jürgen Moltmann). At the turn of the millennium I was asked to write *Preaching and Ethics*. I regard these as continuing the journey of *Preaching as a Social Act* with a sharper theological focus and as a way to assist me and other homileticians to work out the ethical implications implicit in responsible preaching.

Preaching that looks at faith and neglects ethics tends to lack the edge of calling people to discipleship. Those who stress ethics without theology tend to become moralistic as though it is their doing and not God's enabling that is essential. The situation analysis chapter in *Preaching and Ethics* picks up the social act aspect of my earlier work and takes it further because it is now more fully integrated into both theology and ethics. The ethics of character chapter helps to clarify the interplay between the individual and the group in ethical formation and behaviour.

Most recently I have written about preaching and economics. This is an area of sociality that preachers have most often avoided. From my perspective economy needs to be viewed through a theological lens – the sociality of God as Trinity, stewardship of creation, respect for human beings (rather than their commodification) and the covenantal responsibility that obligates nations to mitigate poverty.

So I think *Preaching as a Social Act* was a sort of period piece or a section of a larger puzzle. By raising the issue of sociality we were, on reflection, enabling ourselves to become more aware of how proclaiming the Gospel of Christ is always concretely contextual, but its purpose is to help us address that contextuality with a clearer articulation of the person and work of Christ for us and our world.